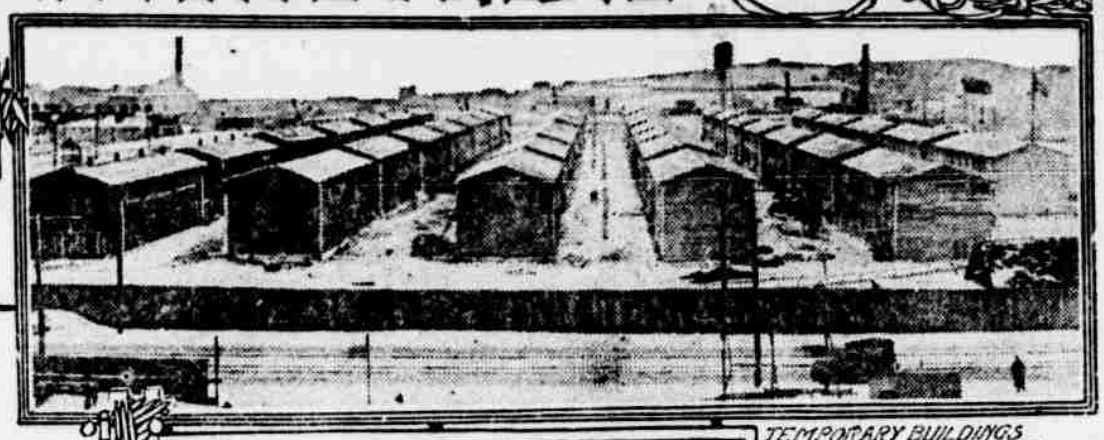
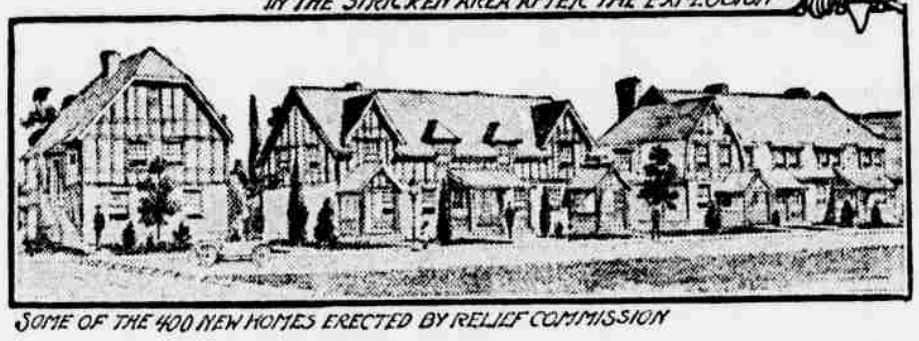
New Halifax Rises From Ruins

T. SHERMAN ROGERS, CHAIRMAN HALIFAX RELIEF COMMISSION



TEMPORARY BUILDINGS ERECTED TO HOUSE THE HOMELESS

IN THE STRICKEN AREA AFTER THE EXPLOSION



SOME OF THE 400 NEW HOMES ERECTED BY RELIEF COMMISSION

Handsome Homes Replace Those Demolished in the Great Disaster That Wrecked Big Area One Year Ago

A YEAR ago, on December 6, one-fifth of the city of Halifax was blasted off the map by the explosion of the steamer Mont Blanc's cargo of TNT. About 2,000 people were killed, between 5,000 and 6,000 were wounded, 36 were made totally blind, the sight of about 350 people was seriously impaired, a large number of dependents were left uncared for, and about $35,000,000 worth of property was wiped out in a few seconds.

A year has passed. What has been done for Halifax and what has Halifax done for itself?

A generous and sympathetic world handed Halifax $3,500,000 to aid in alleviating its distress. The British government gave $5,000,000 and the Canadian government, already under vast expense because of the war, gave $5,000,000 shortly after the TNT explosion occurred, and later added $7,000,000 more so that Halifax would be assured of a square deal.

The sum totals $20,500,000—one of the greatest contributions ever made by a big-hearted public to a stricken city.

What has been done, or is being done, with this vast sum? Many people who opened their hearts and their purses to Halifax would like to know, and this article is designed to supply the information.

The figures given above tell in part what was done for Halifax, but what Halifax has done for itself is a far longer story. Although the victim of a disaster which at once ranked her among the great tragedy cities of the world—Pompeii, Martinique, Galveston and San Francisco—Halifax staggered to her feet a few seconds after the titanic blast had laid waste her streets, destroyed her homes and littered the snow with her dead, and went to work to fetch order out of chaos.

"From a spectacular and heroic point of view," declared George MacDonald of the Canadian Press, "this continent has never produced such a daring set of civilian heroes as sprang up at the call of duty in those bleak December days in Halifax. History teems with horrors—recent history particularly—but no parallel exists for the sequence of affliction with which Halifax was deluged. Swift and appalling death from the withering explosion, mad panic at the fear of a worse disaster from a magazine disruption, horror from the fires which greedily devoured the ruins, torture from the rapidly changing weather conditions which went from blizzard to rain and from rain to zero conditions in the three days succeeding the day of the catastrophe. Fate seemed to have ceased its assaults only when it had exhausted its repertoire of calamities.

"Set against this appalling challenge was the unknown and untried courage of Halifax's citizens. How they battled through the combination of anguish and misery, almost alone for a week, is one of the most inspiring dramas of history."

So much for what Halifax started to do, from the pen of "one who watched this Homeric battle" as a press correspondent. Chief among the plain business men of heroic mold was Robert T. MacIlreith, an ex-mayor of Halifax, who had organized an emergency relief station at the city hall within an hour after the Imo had rammed the Mont Blanc and let loose the devastating explosives pent up in the hold of the latter ship. MacIlreith and his loyal associates not only got on the job at once, but stayed there, practically without rest or sleep for ten days, succoring the wounded, housing the homeless, feeding the destitute, caring for the dependents, providing fuel and transportation, fighting fire and burying the dead.

Every man of force and initiative and managerial ability went to work without a moment's delay. The private car of George E. Graham of the Dominion Atlantic was partly wrecked by the blast, but General Manager Graham at once became a leading spirit in the great task of organizing temporary relief and his railroad gave invaluable assistance in the crisis.

In a week the emergency shelter committee, directed by W. S. Davidson, chairman, housed 6,000 people and a large number were even cared for the very first night. Hospitals were established and 4,000 patients treated in an incredibly short time. Two thousand bodies were handled by the mortuary department.

The reconstruction committee, headed by G. Fred Pearson, a newspaper proprietor, lost no time in organizing the work of building temporary homes for the homeless to cover the period which must elapse before permanent construction could be inaugurated. Mr. Pearson asked Col. Robert S. Low, the man who built the cantonments for the Canadian army, to give Halifax the benefit of his experience, and the colonel went to work at once with plenty of energy, and without pay, to put roofs over the heads of thousands of Halifax people. When he had struck his stride, the man who built Valcartier camp for the Canadian expeditionary force in record time, was finishing a four-room apartment, with bath, every hour. His apartment houses were much like the cantonment buildings at the army camps in Canada and the United States, and housing accommodations were soon ready for 5,000 people.

These various forms of temporary relief caused the expenditure of about $4,000,000, and while this imperative task was being performed plans were formulated for the rebuilding of the devastated area, the settlement of claims and the care of dependents.

The Canadian government, after receiving full reports of the property losses and the needs of Halifax for permanent pensions, rehousing, etc., announced that although no legal liability rested upon the crown, nevertheless the explosion was an incident of the great war which had done enormous damage to Halifax and its environs and for which Halifax was in no may to blame. Steamers loaded with great cargoes of explosives sought Halifax harbor to secure convoy across the Atlantic to the seat of war, and in numerous instances the people of the city whose homes had been destroyed did not even know that they were living on the edge of a volcano. In view of the fact that the French steamship Mont Blanc was "using the harbor in pursuance of the common purpose of the allied nations in carrying on the war," the Canadian government determined to pay all legitimate property losses and establish a pension fund to care for those made dependent by the disaster. The sum of $5,000,000 had already been appropriated, but an additional sum of $7,000,000 was at once placed at the disposal of the stricken city and the Halifax relief commission was appointed and given extraordinary powers to expend the money and afford the necessary relief.

The commission, consisting of T. Sherman Rogers, K. C., chairman; Judge William Bernard Wallace and Frederick Luther Fowke, with Ralph P. Bell as secretary, has been hard at work for months straightening out the tangled affairs of the devastated district, paying claims for damages, erecting new homes and providing permanent pensions for those who were made dependent. The broad powers of the commission were granted by two orders in council and by an act of the Nova Scotia legislature. There were so many complicated matters to settle that the commissioners were empowered to use their own judgment in settling individual claims, in awarding pensions, in expending all the money contributed with the exception of special sums donated for certain purposes, and in replanning and rebuilding the devastated area.

Through the generosity of the Canadian government, every individual who lost his home valued at not more than $5,000, has already had or is having built for him, free of charge, a new home better than the one destroyed by the blast. Claims exceeding $5,000 are being settled by the commissioners, and over 15,000 claims for household and personal effects have already been paid. Five hundred people are receiving permanent pensions and disability allowances.

The Halifax relief commission, upon taking office, secured the services of a first-class firm of architects, and also employed a town-planning adviser. There was a splendid chance to put over a town-planning scheme, architecturally and otherwise, that would be a credit to both Halifax and to Canada, and the commission did not overlook the opportunity confronting it. One thousand homes, not only thoroughly practical, but beautiful, have been planned by the architects, new streets and avenues have been laid out in the devastated area and the replanning and rebuilding program is being carried out with the idea of making Halifax more beautiful than ever.

Months ago contracts were let for 400 houses which were to be completed before winter set in. This work has been done and the remaining permanent houses needed are also under way. The new houses are artistic in design, and of many different types. There is a natural granite procurable in Halifax, and a hydro-stone material closely resembling this is being used, as well as cream-white stucco and rough textured brick.

In the Gottingen street area the houses are grouped around courts, and lawns and playgrounds are part of the general development. The architects have considered the devastated area as an entirety for development purposes, and as the commission backing them has full power to carry out its ideas, the result should be a very interesting experiment in housing and town planning.

The new main boulevards laid out by the commission are 80 feet wide, and the secondary streets vary in width from 50 to 60 feet. Fort Needham, a very picturesque spot of historic interest, has been taken over for park purposes by the commission, and throughout the new development large spaces have been set apart as places of amusement and recreation.

The dominion and imperial government owned the water front property which bore the brunt of the Mont Blanc explosion, and the reconstruction of this area is in charge of governmental departments. Part of this section of the devastated area is now the site of a new steel shipyard employing about 5,000 men, who are engaged in building steel steamships of 10,000 tons. This new industry, of vast benefit to Halifax, was established following the disaster, and, no doubt, because of the disaster.

In view of what she has suffered and overcome in the past, Halifax may well lift with pride a head "bloody but unbowed," and say with W. E. Henley, the author of "Invictis:"

"Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul."

Keeping Workers Amused

"The greatest problem with war workers is keeping them amused," says J. H. Connor, who is in charge of the welfare work at the United States Explosives Plant "C" at Nitro, W. Va. "For unless the workers are able to find entertainment they won't work.

"At the present time there are 15,000 workmen at Nitro and it is planned to increase that number to 40,000. But despite the high wages it is difficult to keep the 15,000 there. Wages are almost unbelievably high. For example: Office boys are started at $75 a month; stenographers at $150, and I have seen the weekly pay envelopes of many carpenters with more than $100 inside. However, it is an actual fact that 20 per cent of the workmen who are transported there at the expense of the government disappear en route and more than 50 per cent of those who arrive do not stay more than two or three days.

"You see, Nitro is a new town about twelve miles from Charlestown, W. Va. It's in a dry section of the country with absolutely nothing to attract workers except high wages. And as soon as the majority of workers save a bank roll they depart for pleasanter and wetter climes.

"That's why a welfare department has been established at this plant, where a million pounds of powder will be manufactured daily when everything is in operation. It was found that unless the men were amused when they finished their work they simply wouldn't remain—no matter what wages were paid.

"Of course we do all the welfare work that is being done in the most modern plants. We have various kinds of hospitals, free medical attention and all that sort of thing. We even fill the teeth of the workmen free of charge. Houses are being built so that the workmen may bring their families and there is everything for their creature comforts, but that isn't enough. The workmen miss the excitement of life in the big cities—they miss the lights, the rush and that feeling of being 'in the swim,' so to speak. While they were merely onlookers they felt that they were taking part in the day's events. When they get to Nitro they soon become dissatisfied and depressed.

"A person who has never worked in a place of this kind cannot appreciate how essential amusement is to his well being. But I must say that we are doing everything possible to keep the workers happy and contented. I'm here in New York to recruit a band and arrange for the appearance of a few musical plays. Of course the summer months will not be so depressing, for we have built scores of bath houses on the river near the plant and hundreds of rowboats and canoes have been ordered. It's the dull winter we're most afraid of."

QUITE SO.

Kaiser—I say, Max, what does Wilson mean by all this talk he's giving us?

Max—He means, All Highest, to say "If you'll come down, we won't shoot."

NATION DEPENDS UPON HOME

Great Truth Revealed by the War Is Not Likely to Be Forgotten When It Ends.

"If the health of the people had been looked after properly, Britain would have a million more fighting men at the front. You cannot have an A-1 nation with a C-3 population," declared Premier Lloyd George in a recent speech at Manchester. Here in America the same thought was forced upon us by the disclosures of physical unfitness in the selective draft, and the comment was made that the military loss thus represented was just as much a loss to the nation industrially and economically.

The British statesman proposes to do more than talk about it. He says the abolition of the evil social conditions of pre-war days will be the greatest problem after the coming of peace. He uses a simile that will appeal to Pittsburgh: "With our machinery we take the greatest care. The way we look after it if the steel is defective through badly-ventilated or ill-constructed furnaces or insufficient fuel! The quality of the steel in the national fabric depends upon the home. If it is unhealthy, ill-equipped, ill-managed, the quality becomes defective and it cannot bear the strain."

To enable the nation to bear the gigantic burden of debt the war will impose on it and the still greater burden of recuperation and reconstruction, Lloyd George warns the national resources must be developed to the full. First among these is the human factor. Just as today everyone of us was expected to do his or her part toward the winning of the war, when the sense of common peril brought to each and all the sense of interdependence, Lloyd George insists that in the years to come we must carry the same spirit into the everyday life of the nation. We must concern ourselves with the cure of our fellow citizens, the steel in the national machine upon which we all depend. We cannot after the war withdraw ourselves into our pre-war selfish isolation. We must constantly keep before us and act upon the same enlightened spirit of comradeship we exact today from every fellow citizen. If we want to remain an A-1 nation, we must see that we have the fewest possible C-3 men, women and children.

The Useful Penny.

Introduction of the penny transfer in the operation of the Indianapolis street car system, which caused the Indianapolis Traction and Terminal company to supply itself with 8,000 pennies the first day, brought to the mind of J. J. Mahoney, superintendent, a story of the eighties when Tom Johnson, afterward mayor of Cleveland, was treasurer, and a supply of pennies in the hands of the company helped to stop a run on a bank. Mr. Mahoney has been connected with the Indianapolis street car system for a long, long time.

In those days passengers dropped a nickel fare in a box and sometimes they put in five pennies. The company was usually overstocked with pennies, and had to send them to the United States mint to get rid of them. The pennies were put in bags. It happened that the company had a lot of bags full of pennies when a run started on a bank. There was a great throng of people at the bank demanding and getting back their deposits. Through an understanding, the bank and the street car company resorted to camouflage. Several street car employees were called in and directed to carry the bags of pennies into the bank. It was an impressive sight, as bag after bag was passed through the cashier's window, and Mr. Mahoney says it had the desired effect.

"Hard" and "Soft" News.

Japanese newspapers, according to Prof. F. L. Martin of the University of Missouri's school of journalism, divide their news into "hard" and "soft." The hard news consists of serious, important events. The soft news includes all sorts of "human interest" incidents. What is called the "third page" of the soft news department consists of trivial stories which would be called gossip in this country. Here is a sample of "third page" soft news:

"Since Etsunaka, a resident of Osakusa, has separated from her master, a coal dealer, she has lost a good opponent for her noted powers of quarreling. The neighbors are breathing freely again at the prospect that they need no longer hear embarrassing quarrels which have made the neighborhood famous. The reaction has been so great that Etsunaka has been downhearted. She says: 'I feel sick now that I have no one to quarrel with.'"—Outlook.

Midget Had Soldier Son.

Admiral Dot, P. T. Barnum's midget celebrity, who died a short time ago, lived to give a stalwart son to the American army in France. Both his parents were of normal size. As midgets go, Admiral Dot was of lesser eminence than Gen. Tom Thumb, but after the latter's death in 1883 he remained first among his kind until his retirement to become a hotelkeeper a quarter of a century ago.

Admiral Dot was American born and purely a native celebrity. He lived to be fifty-nine years old, while Gen. Tom Thumb died at forty six, and the Polish dwarf Boruwaski missed becoming a centenarian by two years

Its Sort.

"Looking at that letter you have just posted, makes me think you have one thing in common with the kaiser."

"What is it?"

"A mailed fist."

Draft Dodger.

"The prima donna is on the war path again," said the stage manager.

"What's the matter now?" asked the impresario.

"She says she feels a draft in her dressing room."

"Ump! She'd better consult that young husband of hers. He's the most successful draft dodger I know."

Up to the Fish.

Game Warden—Hey, kid, don't you know this ain't the season for trout-

Small Boy (fishing)—Sure, but when it is the season there ain't any around, and when it ain't, there's always a lot of them. If the fish ain't goin' to obey the rules, I ain't either—Boys' Life.